NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name The Gus Nelson Homestead

other names/site number 24FR402

2. Location

street & number Missouri River, River Mile #129.4-131.1 right [n/a] not for publication

city or town [n/a] vicinity

state Montana code MT county Fergus code 027

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this _x_ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property _x_ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide _x_ local

Signature of certifying official — Date

Title — State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official — Date

Title — State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

	private
	public - Local
	public - State
X	public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box)

	building(s)
X	district
	site
	structure
	object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4		buildings
		district
2	2	site
		structure
		object
6	2	**Total**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling

Domestic/secondary structures

Agriculture/Subsistence/Agriculture Outbuilding

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/Not in Use

Education and tourism for visitors to the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Western Stick

OTHER/Log Building

OTHER/Vernacular

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete

walls: WOOD/ log

roof: Wood/log/plank; earth/sod

other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Gus Nelson Place consits of the remains of a homestead along the Missouri River in the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. The Nelson Place is located in Township 23 North, Range 22 East, Sections 17 & 18 in Fergus County, Montana. It is near the mouth of Woodhawk Creek and across from Cow Island. The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument is 149 miles of land along the Missouri River in North Central Montana. The property consists of four buidings and two sites. This homestead lies within the south flood plain of the Missouri River. It sits at an elevation of approximately 2,100', with sandy to clay soils. West of the site the breaks rise sharply to an elevation of more than 2700 feet. Flora in and around the Gus Nelson homestead includes a variety of short grasses such as buffalo grass, needle-and -thread, western wheatgrass, green needle grass, blue grama, prairie junegrass, Sandberg bluegrass, and threadleaf sedge. Forbs include milk vetch, blue bell, yarrow, cudweed sagewort, and fringe sagewort. Prickly pear cactus and sagebrush are also dominant on the site. Along the Missouri there are cottonwoods with ponderosa pine, juniper, and Douglas fir. Big game in the area includes elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, antelope, and Rocky Mountain bighorn Sheep. During the historic occupation of the cabin, deer and antelope were the most hunted species. The Nelson Place exemplifies the rural lifestyle of the area with an emphasis on farming and stock raising. The buildings and structures convey a sense of homestead life and the associated hardships such a life entailed.

Description of Resources

Building #1 (contributing): The large main cabin built between 1916 and 1918, is approximately 16'x22' and is constructed out of cottonwood saddle-notched, unhewn logs. The roof is gabled and sodded. The doors and windows are plainly trimmed. Windows are casement type, and doors are batten type. Walls and ceilings are mud daubed. There are two rooms in this building and a cellar. The cellar is accessed through the front room. In the early 1990s, the BLM repaired to this structure as part of a cleanup effort. They repaired the roof, floorboards, and replaced logs on the west side of the building. Part of the repairs also included placing a layer of commercial landscaping fabric on the roof to protect the wood under the sod. They also stabilized the floor joints to ensure the safety of people visiting the site. The BLM used local cottonwood trees for the replacement logs and took great lengths to preserve the integrity of the structure. The structure is in excellent condition.

Building #2 (contributing): This is a small cabin built in 1916. This may have been the original cabin when Nelson established his homestead claim. Nelson moved to the River Property in 1916, and lived in a small cabin (likely Building 2) until the main cabin was built. Building 2 is 11' by 14'. A flagpole/meatpole is attached to the northeast face of the building. The building is constructed out of saddle-notched, unhewn logs. The roof is gabled and sodded, and like Building 1, landscapping fabric was added to the roof. The door is batten type and plainly trimmed. Walls and ceilings are mud daubed. The structure is in excellent condition.

Building #3 (contributing): This henhouse, built between 1916 and 1918, follows the construction tecniques of the other buildings utilizing cottonwood saddle-notched, unhewn logs, a gabled and sodded roof, and mud daubed ceiling and walls. The door is wired shut. There is a small opening for chickens in the door. The roof, as with buildings 1 and 2, was repaired in the 1990s with the addition of landscapping fabric. The building is in good condition.

Building #4 (contributing): This building is a mostly collapsed privy. This two hole privy may still be valuable from an archaeological standpoint as privies often yield archaeological deposits.

Site 1 (contributing): A scattering of historic farm equipment comprises Site 1. Equipment includes a John Deere seeder/drill with metal wheels and a wooden hopper, two disks, a John Deere horse drawn spring seat cultivator with metal wheels, a rubber tired fertilizer, a plow with metal wheels, a furrower, a rubber-tire tractor, a ditcher, a shovel plow with metal wheels, a horse drawn shovel plow, and a harrow. These pieces of equipment are from the historical occupation of the site and contribute to the rural farm setting of the Missouri River homestead period.

Site 2 (contributing): Site consists of an historic trash scatter located near the main cabin. Materials noted encompasses artifacts from decades of occupation including china, battery cores, stove parts, sanitary cans, broken glass, and box springs. This scatter contributes to understanding the lifestyle of historic occupation the Gus Nelson Place.

Sites 3 and 4 (non-contributing): Sites 3 and 4 consist of the remains of a cowshed and corral that were originally associated with the property. Built in 1916, the cowshed measured 30’ x 40’ and was constructed from saddle-notched, unhewn logs. The roof was gabled and sodded. The walls and ceiling were mud daubed (Bass 1983). Bass (1983) recorded a corral during a visit to the site in the early 1980s; the corral was still visible in 1989 photographs of the proeprty.

The Bureau of Land Management undertook cleanup and maintanance of the property in the early 1990s. In December of 1989, Chuck Otto, Bureau of Land Management Area Officer for the Judith Resource Area, sent a letter to the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer, Marcella Sherfy, outlining repairs and clean up at the Nelson Place. The letter proposed repairs to the property including: replacing rotted logs in the west end of Building 1, repair of the roof, and replacement of broken floorboards and broken windows. The BLM proposed using local cottonwood trees to supply the wood needed in the repairs, replacing the rotted wood with original building material. The letter also proposed cleaning up of some of the “hazardous trash” including a building that had fallen into disrepair and become a haven for rattlesnakes. The BLM sought advice from the Montana SHPO as the property had been recommended at potentially eligible for listing on the National Register. The SHPO concurred with the assessment and recommended the Nelson Place as eligible under criteria A and C. They also agreed that the proposed clean up and repairs would have no adverse effect. The BLM commenced work on the property which resulted in the removal of the cowshed and corral.

Integrity

The Gus Nelson Homestead retains very good integrity reflected in its unchanged and difficult to access rural location and its intact architectural materials. Feeling and setting remain unchanged from the original period of significance of 1916 to 1951. The contributing resources of the homestead retain their original locations and association to each other and the surrounding landscape. The historic isolation and severe environment of the Missouri River Breaks area serves as an indelible backdrop to the realities of homesteading in this area. Lack of modern development due to the isolated nature of the area contributes to the integrity of the landscape.

The homestead's historic features display quality of design, material and workmanship, with much of the original construction unchanged. The stability of the buildings remains intact despite years of exposure to the harsh environment. Rehabilitation and maintenance of the buildings using sympathetic materials has slowed deterioration. The Gus Nelson Homestead provides a unembellished view of homestead life along the Missouri River in the Missouri River Breaks in the early 1900s. It provides a reminder of the people who came to this area to etch out a living, become landowners, and neighbors. It was not the easiest place to practice agriculture, but the people who setted this area perservered and left their mark on the land.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

[X] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

[ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

[X] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

[ ] A owed by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] B removed from its original location.

[ ] C a birthplace or grave.

[ ] D a cemetery.

[ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

[ ] F a commemorative property.

[ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE; EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

Period of Significance

1916-1951

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

August "Gus" Nelson

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance encompasses the construction and use of the Gus Nelson Place through the historic period.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Gus Nelson homestead is significant at a local level and eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its historic association with land settlement in the early 1900s along the Missouri River. It is also eligible for listing under Criterion C as a fine example of vernacular architecture common to early homesteads that once dotted the banks of the Missouri River in this area. The property has existed in rural isolation, retaining the integrity of an inaccessible Missouri River Breaks homestead. Few homesteads exist which are in as good of condition.

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

The Gus Nelson Homestead is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its embodiment of agricultural settlement along the Missouri River and across much of central Montana in the early 1900s. Visually, little has changed in terms of the buildings or the landscape since the construction of the homestead, which easily conveys the harsh realities, associated with living in the Missouri River Breaks.

Initially settled in 1916, this location witnessed multiple owners, including bachelors and families. Gus Nelson settled this claim in 1916, and realizing the initial land grant would not be enough acreage to grow crops to provide a self sustaining profitable agricultural enterprise, he began using other federal land grants to enlarge his holdings.

The Gus Nelson Homestead is also Significant under Criteria C as an excellent representation of vernacular architecture using locally available cottonwoods in the building construction. The Gus Nelson Homestead is one of the best preserved homestead complexes along the Missouri River in the Missouri River Breaks. This homestead still stands as a reminder of the past. People visit the homestead to enjoy the visual aspects of the river breaks and learn about history from an intact homestead.

Developmental history/additional historical context information

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
____previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #_____

Primary location of additional data:

____State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
__X__Federal agency
____Local government
____University
____Other
Name of repository: **BLM Lewistown Field Office**

Abbot, Jim
1976 *Jim Abbot May 24, 1976, 207 Commercial, Lewistown, Montana; Recorded by Edrie Vinson, BLM Historian, Missouri River History Project*, on file at the Bureau of Land Management Field Office, Lewistown, Montana.

Archer, David R.
n/d *Back Trailings, The old-time west*, unpublished manuscript on file at the Montana Agricultural Library and Archives, Fort Benton, Montana.

Archer, David R. Jr.
1976 "Peoples Column," in the March 10, issue of the *River Press*, Fort Benton, Montana.

Arthur, Jim
2003 Bob O'Boyle Interview with Jim Arthur, personal communication on December 1,*Making a Living in the Missouri River Breaks: Oral Histories of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument*.

1997 *Retracing Kipp Trails*, Central Montana Publishing, Lewistown, Montana.

1988 *A History of Winifred, Montana*, Central Montana Publishing, Lewistown,Montana.

Bass, Sandra
1983 *Montana State Office Site Form 24FR402 Gus Nelson Homestead*, report on file, Archaeological Records, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

Bergum, Jack and Loraine Bergum
2004 Interview with Jack and Loraine Bergum personal communication on July 28, 2004, included in *More Making a Living In the Missouri River Breaks: Additional Oral Histories of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument*, on file with the Lewstown BLM.

Berry, Lee, Rose Berry and Judy Berry
2004 2004 Interview with Lee, Rose, and Judy Berry personal communication on July 29, 2004, included in *More Making a Living In the Missouri River Breaks: Additional Oral Histories of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument*, on file with the Lewstown BLM.

Burlingame, Merrill G.
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1989 *Thunderstorms and Tumble Weeds: 1887-1987 East Blain County*, Jostens Publishing and Printing, Visalia, California.

Cheney, Roberta Carkeek
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Culbertson, Mollie
1976 Interview with Mollie Culberson part 1, interview by Edri Vinsen August 9, 1976, included in *Making a Living in the Missouri River Breaks: Oral Histories of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument*.

Dalich, C.A.
1968 *Dry Farming Promotion in Eastern Montana (1907-1916),* unpublished Masters Thesis from the University of Montana, on file at the Mansfield Library, Missoula, Montana.

Deal, Babbie and Loretta McDonald
1976 *The Heritage Book of Central Montana*, Fergus County Bi-Centenial Heritage Committee.

Dempsey, Hugh A.
2001 "Blackfoot," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 13 part 1 Plains*, William C. Sturtevant general editor, Raymond J. DeMallie volume editor, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C.

Eigell, Robert W.
1987 *Cows, Cowboys, Canners, and Corned Beef and Cabbage: The Last Large-scale Epic about the Northern Ranges of the West*, Vantage Press, New York, New York.

Fowler, Loretta
2001 "History of the United States Plains Since 1850," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 13 part 1 Plains*, William C. Sturtevant general editor, Raymond J. DeMallie volume editor, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C.

Fulbright, Zane L.
1998 *Missouri River Manors: An Overview of Homesteads and Historic Structures along the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River*, U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management, report on file at Bureau of Land Management Field Office, Lewistown, Montana.

Gillespie, Michael
2000 *Wild River, Wooden Boats: True Stories of Steamboating and the Missouri River*, Heritage Press, Stoddard, Wisconsin.

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Kunhardt, Phillip B. Jr., Phillip B. Kunhardt III, and Peter W. Kunhardt
1992 *Lincoln: An Illustrated Biography*, Alfred A. Knoff Press, New York, New York.

Kurland, Philip B. and Ralph Lerner
1987 *The Founders of the Constitution, Volume 1 Major Themes*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.

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Lepley, John G.
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1999 *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, Missoula, Montana.

Loken, Scott C.
1993 *Montana During World War Two*, unpublished Masters Thesis in Western History, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

Malone, Michael P. and Richard B. Roeder
1975 *Montana As It Was: 1876: A Centennial Overview*, Endowment and Research Foundation, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana.

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2001 "American Indian Timber Management Policy," in *Trusteeship in Change: Toward Tribal Autonomy in Resource Management*, edited by Richmond L. Clow and Imre Sutton University Press of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.

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1977 "Homesteaders," in *Montana Magazine of the Northern Rockies*, Vol 7(2):16-21.

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Presser, Marvin W.
1997 *Wolf Point: A City of Destiny*, M Press, Billings, Montana.

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1986 Chan Biggs Interview with Ervin Smith, interview April 8, 1986 from *Making a Living in the Missouri River Breaks: Oral Histories of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument*..

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Vivhorek, Daniel N.
1993 *The Hi-Line: Profiles of a Montana Land*, American & World Geographic Publishing, Helena, Montana.

Wood, James Jr.
1999 *History Of Loma, Montana (Chappell)*, Rettig Publishing, Inc./ DBA Mountaineer Printing, Big Sandy, Montana.

Writers Project of Montana
2002 *Copper Camp: The Lusty Story of Butte, Montana, The Richest Hill on Earth,* Riverbend Publishing, Helena, Montana.

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 42
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet) NAD 1983

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	12	654942.02	5290770.45
2	12	654,855.9	5,290,870.3
3	12	654,852.1	5,290,455.9
4	12	655,104.0	5,290,577.8
5	12	655,274.7	5,290,691.5
5	12	655,550.9	5,290,887.2

Legal Land Description: **Township 23 North, Range 22 East, Section 17, S ½ of SW ¼**

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The boundary of the nominated property is delineated by the polygon on the USGS map Cow Island; MT 1954 and Baker Monument, MT 1954.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The boundary includes the house, outbuildings, farm implements, and the adjacent area that historically was part of the Gus Nelson Homestead and maintains the historic integrity.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Robert O'Boyle
organization Integrity Resources Archaeology date July 18, 2009
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city or town Potomac state MT zip code 59823
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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

  A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs: see continuation sheet

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Gus Nelson Homestead

City or Vicinity: Missouri River, River Mile #129.4-131.1 right

County: Fergus **State:** Montana
sdfsdf
Photographer: see table below

Date Photographed: see table below

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 23 .

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

Prior to the arrival of August "Gus" Nelson or any of the other emigrants into the Missouri River Breaks, Native Americans occupied the region. However, beginning in the 1800s, Americans began exploring the area. Gus Nelson was one of many individuals who immigrated to Montana from all over the world to find a better life.

Exploration and the Fur Trade 1803 - 1859

The impetus for the expansion of European-Americans into the west really began with the idea of Manifest Destiny. In Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* he writes, "we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman. It is best than that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement …Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God" (Kurland and Lerner 1987:118). Thus, the philosophical framework for the expansion of the west was set. Jefferson famously commissioned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to lead the Corps of Discovery in the Louisiana Territory. Lewis and Clark reached the Upper Missouri in 1805, camping at many locations along the river and writing descriptions of the fauna and flora found in the region. Manuel Lisa and a crew of men followed in 1807, and quickly American fur companies and traders were competing with Canadian representatives of the British Hudson Bay Company and the Scottish North-West Company who were already establishing relations and agreements with the Native Americans, who controlled the resources of the west (Montana Historical Society 1976).

The early trade was in beaver and other fine furs. The French and Canadian traders set out to establish forts or posts, conducting commerce by waiting for Indian peoples to bring the furs to them. Lisa's approach was different. Lisa attempted to bypass the Native Americans in the trade and instead placed white trappers and hunters in direct competition with the Indian hunters (Oglesby 1963). Predictably, the competition for resources led to an increase in white Indian conflict. Thus, as traders and explorers began to establish themselves in the west, the military followed to protect expanding American interests.

The Missouri River was particularly important in western expansion, because it provided the easiest access to the resources of the west. Many different kinds of water crafts were used to travel up the Missouri including the bullboats and the dugouts of the Indians followed by the mackinaws and keelboats of the early traders (Gillespie 2000). The traders quickly employed steamboats as an easier method of transporting large quantities of goods on the Missouri, as the large keelboats were dangerous and labor intensive. The *Independence* was the first steamboat up the Missouri in 1819, and by 1829, Kenneth MacKenzie had established Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone River for the American Fur Company, and it was here the steamboat entered into the fur trade (Lepley 2001). The steamboat on the Missouri accelerated trade because of its increased cargo capacity. On July 15, 1831, the steamboat *Yellowstone* returned from Fort Union with "a full cargo of buffalo robes, furs, peltries, besides ten thousand pounds of buffalo

tongues" (Burlingame 1929:275). In the fall of the same year, James Kipp, an employee of the American Fur Company, built Fort Piegan, at the mouth of the Marias River. However, the American Fur Company only used the fort for a short period, operating from October of 1831 to the spring of 1832. Fort Piegan was very lucrative and when Kipp returned to Fort Union that spring it was with: 9,000 buffalo robes, 2,800 muskrat pelts, 1,200 beaver pelts, 1,500 prairie dog pelts, 40 otter pelts, 390 buffalo tongues, 200 Red Fox pelts, and 19 bear skins (Arthur 1997). The die was cast; the Upper Missouri River was a rewarding place to do business. Indians burned Fort Piegan soon after Kipp and the others left. But because business was so good, the American Fur Company built Fort Mackenzie in 1832 only six miles up river from the remains of Fort Piegan, where it did business (Cheney 1983). Beginning in 1834, Fort Mackenzie came under the supervision of Alexander Culbertson, who left the fort to Francis A. Chardon's charge in 1841. Chardon and his men were in a skirmish where they fired a cannon point-blank at a group of Blackfeet who had come to trade, killing and wounding thirty of the men (Lepley 1999). They soon realized the dangers of killing a group of Blackfeet in Blackfeet Territory and they abandoned Fort Mackenzie. Culbertson returned to the Upper Missouri River and built a fort at the mouth of Cottonwood Creek on the south side of the river, but he soon found this location was less than practical and in 1847, eighteen years after the establishment of Fort Union, construction began on what, in 1850, would be called Fort Benton (Lepley 1999). Fort Benton became the premier trading post on the Missouri River, and thousands of people began traveling up the Missouri. Not only did steamboats tramsport goods and materils, they made people aware of the abundance of land along the Missouri.

Early settlement in the late 1850's and the Open Range

The United States Government needed to address the movement of peoples into the western lands. The House of Representatives Public Land Committee declared that squatting on public lands "was inevitable and even desirable" in 1828 (McQuillan 2001:75). The process began for the legalized settlement of public lands. A number of acts finally resulted in the Federal Homestead Act of 1862. Aberaham Lincoln signed the act into law on May 20, offering 160 acres of public owned land to anyone who claimed and occupied an area for five years while making improvements on it, prompting more and more people to move west (Kunhardt Jr. et.al. 1992:180). However, free land was not the only reason for people to move west.

Events culminated in the 1850's and early 1860's leading to increased populations in the west. In 1855, the Blackfeet signed a treaty with Governor of the Washington Territory, Isaac Stevens, at the mouth of the Judith River creating the groundwork for the railroad to cross through the country (Dempsey 2001). Joining the Blackfeet at the Judith were represenatives from the Salish, Pend d'Oreille, Nez Perce, and Broken Arm and his band of Cree (Hungry Wolf 2006). The United States also began to see immigration on a large scale with the population tripling in the years from 1850 to 1900, with many emigranting west (Toole 1959). Furthermore, the territory's residence began to see the beginnings of a gold rush. In July of 1862, miners made the first large strike in the area later known as Montana at Grasshopper Creek. The strike rapidly attracted people who settled the first gold town, Bannack, in the area (Montana Historical Society 1976). Gold discovered in Bannack caused a rush, similar, though somewhat smaller in scale to those that had

already hit California, Colorado, and Nevada. The period of the gold rush saw the first major migration of the area. Settlement occurred as a result of the fur and hide trade, as trappers would "look for a little color" in the streams in there spare time (Cascade County Historical Society 1981).

In 1859 and 1860, Lieutenant John Mullan and crew completed the Mullan Road, a 624-mile route connecting Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton (Lepley 1999). The Mullan Road allowed Fort Benton to transform from a fur trade post to a port, shipping people and goods from back east to the west and vise versa. With the rush for gold also came other groups besides miners - including, farmers, ranchers, and entrepreneurs. The first steamboat reached Fort Benton during the high waters in the spring of 1860, allowing the mountain region to be readily accessible for the first time (Toole 1959). A community, beyond that of a trading post or mining camp, began to emerge. Fort Benton experienced a "building boom" in the 1860's as "saloons, brothels, gambling houses and other commercial enterprises sprang up along the levee" (Lepley 1999:40).

As the imigration increased, the country was involved in conflicts on several fronts. The miners and settlers during the gold rush created increased tension between whites and Indians, as more and more moved into Indian lands. Displaced tribes in the east were being pushed west, causing wars between different Indian tribes. There was also turmoil in the eastern part of the nation. The Civil War divided the country - pitting brother against brother; an unpopular war that undoubtedly saw many people choose to leave the states for the west. Following the Civil War there were many volunteer military regiments that headed west and began to propagate the interest of the United States Government, protecting white settlers in Indian Country and setting the stage for the Indian Wars in the west (Fowler 2001).

The time of trappers, traders, and explorers gave way, as people were coming to the area to live and raise families. Settlement in the breaks had begun as Woodhawkers, like Mose La Tray, began to settle along the river cutting wood and selling it to steam ships in the 1860's (Deal and McDonald 1976). Cow Island was important along the river; because, many of the steamboats had problems reaching Fort Benton, since the Missouri was unpredictable and not easy to pilot. The bottom at Cow Island was often the farthest point that riverboat captains could navigate on the river, therefore, boats were unloaded there and freighters, called bullwhackers, took shipments overland on the Cow Island Trail. The Cow Island trail was about 120 miles long; going up Cow Creek and then west across Bullwhacker Coulee toward Warrick, then south of the Bear Paws and the big northern bend in the Missouri and finelly turning south toward Fort Benton (Arthur 1988). T.C. Powers began his long history of business in the area during this steamboat era forming the Benton Transportation Company, moving freight through stagecoaches, steamboats, mule, and oxen trains.

One of the biggest problems of the early small farming/ranching operation was the small size of the average farm or ranch. While 160 acres may have been enough land to make a living in Virginia or Illinois, the harsh "American Desert" was unforgiving. In the area soon to become Western Montana, the people made a living based on the extraction of resources such as precious metals and lumber, along with merchants, ranchers and farmers. However, the eastern and central portion of the territory "depended on grass, weather, and

luck" (Toole 1959:141). Small homesteaders had trouble getting a foothold in eastern portion of the territory, and the cattle became the driving force of the economy in the area. With few regulatory factors and even less real enforcement, the cattlemen soon began to control large portions of the territory in order to maintain their growing herds. The government gave right of "prior occupation," granting an additional 640 acres to the original homesteads in the Desert Land Act of 1877; however, it was still only for "a few hundred acres" – even for those with herds of cattle in the tens of thousands (Toole 1959:141). Men, such as Johnnie Grant, had begun to develop large herds of cattle by the mid 1850's, allowing the demands of the miners in the 1860's to be met. Grant built up his herd by trading two trail weary cows for one well-fed cow, rapidly multiplying his herds (Toole 1959). By the 1860's, when the settlement of the Missouri River was beginning, men like Conrad Kohrs were making their fortunes running cattle. Most of the people coming into the territory wanted to dig for gold and not mess with cattle. Con Kohrs started as a butcher setting up the Highland City Meat Market with 1000 cows, and quickly became a wealthy man owning land and running cattle all over Montana (Cascade County Historical Society 1981). Robert and Clifford Tingley, who settled in the Big Sandy area, drove a large herd of cattle from Cheyenne, Wyoming (Lawrence 1963).

In 1864, Montana officially became a territory; however, territory-ship hardly constituted organization. The deep division the country was experiencing because of the Civil War found its way to the new Montana Territory. In 1863, Abe Lincoln assigned Sidney Edgerton, a man who called Southerners "uncultivated savages," to be Territory Governor of Montana Territory (Toole 1959:98). However, many of the mining camps were filling with Southerners and creating a tension between the Territory Governor and the legislature. It was during this later part of the 1860's where River traffic peaked. In 1867, alone the riverboat freight business made three million dollars in profits, with over 24 million dollars in gold moving down the Missouri in 1867 and 1868 (Lepely 1999).

The placer mining boom began to slow down and by 1868, while some people were still looking for the big strike, others were beginning to leave the Montana territory seeking their fortunes elsewhere. The landscape in central and eastern Montana was shifting, from mining to ranching and farming. The decade of the 1870's, found a significant increase in farms in Montana, jumping from 851 in 1870 to 1,519 in 1880 with the acres being farmed quadrupling (Malone and Roeder 1975). The territory's population continued to grow with over 20,000 people in the 1870 census (Gutfeld 1979). In Butte, the silver and gold mines that had been found in 1865 and 1866 were being replaced with copper mines, enticing many of the "hard-bitten and experienced miners" from California, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah, as well as many of the immigrants from Ireland and Wales to travel to Montana (Writers Project of Montana 2002).

Montana also offered other opportunities. The Montana Territory was the last of the open range, and in the 1870's and 1880's the cattlemen sought to take advantage of the opportunity (Presser 1997). Robert S. Ford, who was a freighter over the Mullan Trail, saw the Sun River area as a great place for cattle and he moved 1412 head from Colorado in 1870, branding them with a "70" to commemorate the year; the 70 herd was one of the earliest north of the Missouri (Cascade County Historical Society 1981). Soon Ford and others were trailing many more herds into the area. The vicinity along the river

had plenty of water and good grass for feed. Ranchers along the Sun River formed the first Montana stock association in 1874 (Lepley 1999). Herds were swelling and outfits like the Home Land and Cattle Company, also known as the "N-N," had 100,000 cows on the open range at one point (Presser 1997). On the Missouri River, some of the large ranches ran a thousand cattle at a time in the breaks (Abbot 1976). While many herds moving up to Montana were longhorns from Texas, Durham shorthorn crosses from Oregon and Washington began to be crossed with the longhorns because they could winter better and put on weight faster (Cascade County Historical Society 1981). Range cattle would get quite wild, "just like a bunch of deer" (Abbot 1976:7). As the herds grew, the number of people trying to get in on the action was growing as well. In 1884, Grandville Stuart, Teddy Roosevelt, and a number of other ranchers formed the Montana Livestock Association, in part to organize against the growing number of cattle rustlers in the area, declaring "outright war," on the cattle rustlers – who hid out in the Missouri River Breaks (Centennial Book Committee 1989). "Stuart's Stranglers," as they were called, managed to break the rustlers might through brutal methods.

One of the biggest ranches found along the Missouri River was the Powers Norris Ranch. The confluence of the Judith and Missouri was an important location along the Missouri, with occupation at all phases of Montana history. Native American peoples had trails, residential sites, and burial grounds located in this area (Monahan and Biggs 1997). Additionally, Judith Landing had been the location of Fort Chardon in 1844 – 1845, Camp Cooke in 1866, and T.C. Power's Built Fort Claggett in the same location in 1869, and in 1872, Power moved the post a quarter mile up the Judith where he established the stone trading post and the Powers Norris Ranch operation (Arthur 1997; Monahan and Biggs 1997). The Powers Norris, or PN, employed many cowboys from all over the country. The PN trading post was an important feature on the river serving as store, restaurant, and post office (Presser 1997; Culbertson 1976). The place also was the location of the PN Cable Ferry, which ran from 1880 to 1908 (Monahan and Biggs 1997).

As the ranches began to grow, several factors came together to create a need for more land and the possibility for ranchers to get it. Ranchers continued to move more and more cattle into the area, despite the lack of legal claim to the land. As cattle herds grew the range began to be overgrazed, and in the breaks, ranchers would move their cattle out in the winter and allow them to feed on the "home ranches" farther back from the breaks (Abbot 1976:23). In 1885, cattle prices dropped slightly and many cattlemen held off on shipping their cattle back east, but the drop in prices was followed by the devastating winter of 1886 – 1887 (Toole 1959). The tough winter in 1886 and 1887, immortalized by Charley Russell's "Last of the 5000" or "Waiting for A Chinook," saw many cattle lost, and ranchers desperately needed lands to reestablish the herds.

Indian people had largely maintained control of the area north of Fort Benton into the 1870's. During the mid 1800's, Gros Ventre, Lakota, and Blackfeet frequently attacked remote settlements and wagon trains, but times were changing. The bison herds which had numbered an estimated 6 million in 1870, were virtually eliminated in the area by 1883, with the last one in the area killed in Eagle Creek in 1889 (Laurence 1963). The elimination of the bison was significant because the bison was a staple for tribes in the area, and cutting cattlemen's competition for the rangeland. The decimation of the

bison herds effectively ended the whiskey and hide trade. Pressure also increased on Indian people by U.S. military after the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The year following the Battle of Little Big Horn, in 1877, a group of Nez Perce crossed the Missouri at Cow Island, where there was a small skirmish before American soldiers caught Joseph's group just south of the modern location of Chinook (Toole 1959).

Many Indian people near the Missouri River began the long process of settling into reservation life. Just as the absence of the bison on the plains left a niche that livestock filled, the forced removal of Indian peoples left the area open to further settlement. The Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, divided reservation lands into individual allotments (Toole 1959:135). The Euro-American population long attempted to compel the concept of personal land ownership on Indian people. The Dawes Act shifted the system in Indian Country from tribal ownership to individual Indian ownership, and left all "unclaimed land" opened to white settlement. The cattle industry, coming off a desperate time in the "Last of the 5000" winter, eagerly began to move into the area for free grass. Along with more land opening for homesteading, new means of transportation came into the area.

On April 2, 1887 James Hill began laying track in Minot, North Dakota. By September 28, the crew passed through Fort Benton and on October 15, the railroad had reached Great Falls (Vichorek 1993:14). Mining companies had utilized the railroad in the southwest portion of the territory for several years before to great success. Late in 1881, the Utah and Northern narrow gage connected Butte with Ogden, Utah (Writers Project of Montana 2002). The railroads were important to the Montana economy at the time both providing a means to efficiently import and export goods, in addition to providing work for a number of people, with over 8,000 men on the 1887 project alone (Historical Book Committee 1962). The introduction of the railroad into north central Montana was one of the most significant changes in commerce of the area since the arrival of fur traders. The cattle business continued to grow and by 1890, individual herds estimated at up to 25,000 head at a time forded the river at the Judith Landing on the Missouri (Cheney 1983). Railroad and cow towns sprang up quickly, and as the means for transportation improved, riverboat traffic slowed. Cities like Malta, Big Sandy, Glasgow, Roy, Winifred, Chinook, and Wolf Point began to thrive as shipping locations for sheep and cattle.

Montana officially became a state in 1889. Statehood meant several things to Montana and its settlers. It gave Montanans representation in government and it opened the door to more homesteading. Before anyone could homestead, the land needed to be surveyed. One of the early methods was to tie a rag to a wagon wheel and determine how many revolutions it would take to stake out 160 acre track or later 320 (Lawrence 1963). Statehood meant a system of legitimate government began to be implemented. The days of take what you want were giving way to the legalized settlement of land in Montana.

Homestead Boom 1910 through 1919

The early 1900's saw the cattle business in Montana declining, and agriculture was emerging as the main industry in eastern Montana. The cattle had overgrazed, in a decade, land that had supported millions of bison for millennia (Toole 1959). The railroad companies had made a substantial investment in the rail through Montana, and they were not going to let their

money go to waste. The Great Northern needed people to keep their trains full, and in 1909, they began to promote the area with vigor. Jim Hill, "the empire builder," began to travel throughout the world propagating his vision of dry-land farming with a "family farm on every 160- or 320- acre tract on the high plains" (Presser 1997:5). Montana was portrayed as the promised-land - "a land where a poor man could make his fortune on his own land, his plow literally turning over the coin of prosperity" (Montana Historical Society 1976:169). In 1909, the government aided in Hill's cause by passing the Enlarged Homestead Act, increasing the number of acres on a homestead from 160 to 320, and in 1912 they further augmented the act by reducing the time it took to "prove up" from five to three years (Toole 1959). In addition, in 1910, the government passed an act allowing for homesteading on known coal lands. Several farming and ranching operations in the Missouri River Breaks benefited from this and had coal operations supplement their livelihood. It worked, and the homestead boom was on, with over 42 percent of Montana's land settled, and most of it in the eastern part of the state (Miller 1977). People began to trickle into Montana for the last of the free land in 1909 and 1910 and by 1911, homesteaders were pouring in. Many people came on emigrant trains or cars. The homesteader would purchase transport on a railroad car where they could pack all of their possessions and go west. The homesteader would be met at the train by a "locator" who would whisk them out in the countryside to look at land, and the land was flat and to the people from a humid area the fact that there were no trees and no water did not always seem like an immediate problem (Toole 1959). However, the arid Montana prairie soon proved too difficult for many.

There was plenty of deception at the time about the fertile land and new dryland farming techniques during the second decade of the twentieth century. Initially the weather was cooperating. From 1910 to 1917, farms were productive in both relation to the weather and the price of grain. In 1916, Northern Wheat sold for $1.05 a bushel, Hard Montana Wheat was $1.04 a bushel, flax was $2.10 a bushel, oats were $1 a bushel, and eggs sold for 15¢ a dozen and butter was 35¢ a pound (Wood 1999). However, while many early homesteaders were grain farmers, "stock remained the big economic factor in the mountains and along the Missouri River" (Lawrence 1963:33). In 1916, the Government further helped the homesteading cause by passing the Stock Raising Homestead Act, which gave a homesteader up to 640 acres. The government designed the Stock Raising Homestead Act specifically for lands that were chiefly valuable for grazing and required residency and one dollar and twenty-five cents worth of improvements per acre. The railroads began to expand into area such as Lewistown and Wolf Point to provide services for the budding communities and to ship goods out of the state.

Numerous homesteaders came to the Missouri River during the boom, but the Missouri breaks area presented unique problems for the early settlers. One of the most crucial differences in the breaks is the isolation. While many of the people would gather for dances and card games, the area was still very broken up. The deep valleys and coulees were geographical barriers that would isolate neighbors, which may account for the many single male homesteaders as opposed to families in the breaks. While there were several families that did homestead along the river like the Sanfords, Kipps, Jones, and Hagadones, many homesteaders were single middle age men. Many of these men like Jack Ervin, George Middleton, and August "Gus" Nelson never married. Some people were complete hermits. There were "a number" of people, likely

all men, in the Missouri River Breaks who "for reasons known only to themselves, forsook civilization and choose to live a single, solitary existence by means known only to themselves" (Eigell 1987:304). The breaks, in addition to being geographically isolating, also cut back on productivity of lands on a homestead. There was not enough room to have a useful grain farm, even on the fertile lands along the river. Many people went into ranching; horses were popular as were cattle and sheep.

The Depression and the years 1919 through 1945

Many of the homesteads established in the early portion of the second decade of the twentieth century were quickly disappearing by the late teens. Many of the men served in World War I from the Missouri River Breaks area. Some of the veterans from World War I could not keep up with the improvements required to keep their homestead and they had to leave. Others managed to get their time in the service to count toward their time to prove up on their homestead. The war elevated the price of wheat, and many homesteaders, seeing prices climb, began to invest in new equipment and land. People began to buy cars, and seemingly, the homesteaders were going to be able to make a good go of it, but as the war ended, prices for grain began to fall, and land that had been producing twenty five bushels an acre were now only producing two and a half bushels an acre (Toole 1959). Many people had stuck their necks out on the premise of high yields and high prices, taking out loans against their land. The end of the war corresponded with environmental disaster in Montana in the form of drought. Those homesteaders who came found they did not have enough land to make it and many just starved out, simply turning loose their livestock and walking away (Deal and McDonald 1976).

In addition to the poor productivity of the badlands, many of the homesteaders were inexperienced at farming and ranching and failed because of inexperience. Emigrants came to the area with the promise of good fertile free land, but many were from European cities and had no idea how to farm, and the isolation of the river proved to be too much for many. Many of those who homesteaded along the river did not speak English. Scores of those who had been barrowing money against their land, in hopes of the next big crop, lost it to the bank a few years later. Some of the people who left went to Butte and worked in the mines, others went to work for the railroad or to neighboring towns and settled, and several left Montana completely. Montana's government was trying to minimize the effects that drought was having. The Billings Chamber of Congress, fearing the news of the drought would ruin Montana's reputation as a stable farming and ranching area, stated, "industries are being discouraged by grossly exaggerated reports of failure and ruin in this state" (Dalich 1968:6). There is no accurate account of the influx of people into Montana during the second decade of the nineteenth century as many of the homesteaders came after the 1910 census and fled before the 1920 census.

The agricultural community began to make a slight recovery in the 1920's, but the drought that had begun in 1917, continued for the most part into the 1930's. The largest exodus from the Missouri River country was in 1919 (Lawrence 1963). It was around 1920 that the winds began to blow. Since much of the land had been cultivated and there was no grass to hold down the soil and the topsoil blew to North Dakota (Toole 1959). Further complicating problems grain prices were dropping. Wheat that was $2.34 a bushel in 1919

was down to 92 cents in 1922, likewise from 1919 to 1921, cattle dropped from $9.92 per hundred pounds to $5.42, sheep fell from $9.92 per hundred pounds to $4.49, and wool dropped from 58 cents to 19 cents per pound (Lawrence 1963). In 1921, there was further distress for those who were hanging on, hoping that the next crop would be the one that saved them, borrowing money against the land for seed, but that year wheat stem maggots, grasshoppers, and Mormon crickets, combined with continuing drought to send more homesteaders away (Lawrence 1963). Often homesteaders would prove up on their land and get a deed to it, and then would borrow money against it from a loan company, usually about $3000, and walk away (Arthur 1988). In 1929, during these tough times, the stock market crashed marking the official beginning of the Great Depression.

As elsewhere around the country, the 1930's were hard times in the Missouri River Breaks. People seemed to have a "we are all in this together" attitude. The agricultural community, which was Montana's leading industry, lost nearly 53 percent of its annual revenue between 1930 and 1932. In addition, between 1930 and 1940, 5,672 Montana farms went bankrupt (Loken 1993). The Government sought to provide relief to the nation in a variety of ways. Roosevelt came forth with his New Deal. Programs like the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) sought to give relief to struggling Montana farmers, subsidize their incomes, reducing the acreage they needed to farm (Loken 1993). In 1933, Roosevelt established the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). These groups put people in the Missouri Breaks region to work on a variety of projects ranging from planting trees to the building of dams. The construction of Fort Peck, while displacing many people who were living on the river, put more than ten thousand people to work (Spritzer 1999). People were working on building highways, with 33.5 million dollars going to improve and build 2,756 miles of highway in Montana (Loken 1993). Young men working for the CCC were paid thirty dollars a month and families received a twenty-five dollar allotment (CCC Alumni 2004). Times were especially hard in 1937, and as cattle prices fell and farmers continued to struggle, the Government passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. The government would buy back many of the private lands that they deemed agriculturally unfit.

WWII and After

World War II was a significant event to those living in the Missouri River Breaks in several ways. Most of the New Deal projects lasted through the thirties and up to the mid 1940's, with the bombing of Pear Harbor and America's entrance into World War II. In the early 1940's, Montana's unemployment rate had hit a ten-year low, with only 9000 unemployed, as Montana and the nation began to recover from the depression (Loken 1993). The WPA, the CCC, and other programs, while not officially eliminated, had their funding canceled as the country went into the war. Before the war, the country was still struggling to recover from the Great Depression, which had hit the area of the Missouri River between 1915 and 1920. Following the Second World War, people were able to go and get a job that would pay; many who had been living hand to mouth suddenly had cash and were able to buy things. The increased cost of labor also made it more expensive to run an operation, especially a large one. The rising cost of labor may also have fueled the mechanization of farms. While the price of cattle or grain was at the mercy of the market, labor is a controllable cost, and mechanization allowed farms and ranches to cut labor costs. In 1945, the average size farm

had grown to over 1,500 acres and a full 64 percent were using tractors, compared with 36 percent in 1930 (Loken 1993). The mechanization of farms allowed the farms and ranches to increase in size and increase in production on those lands. Family farms and ranches were beginning to be divided generation after generation, and many of the farmer's children were leaving the farm to find work elsewhere or go to school. A consequence of this pattern was for many of the farms and ranches to be sold to neighbors allowing for the consolidation of land. Farms and ranches continue to consolidated and grow as the "ma and pop" farm or ranch becomes, more often, the corporate industry.

Missouri River Breaks Homesteaders

In most respects, the settlement of the Missouri River bottoms and breaks followed the basic patterns experienced in eastern Montana. What differentiated them from the "typical" homesteaders was the lack of a communal identity. The river did not provide the cohesion many homesteaders elsewhere created at supply towns and railroad landings. Settlers were all identified as Missouri River Breaks homesteaders, but they did not unite as a "Breaks" community. The river united them in their identity, but it did not unite them as a community with a central gathering point. Early in the river's settlement steamboats and barges would drop off supplies and mail, as well the news of "happenings" along the river and the rest of the world. People on the river were far from the communities of Winifred, Fort Benton, Geraldine, and the no longer extant communities of Eagle Butte and Graceville. Amenities common in these towns were not had on the river: no school or post office, store or barber to serve all the settlers. To take advantage of these resources, settlers ultimately had to leave the river.

As a fringe population, Missouri River Breaks homesteaders, generally speaking, were single males. Couples and families also lived along the river, but compared to the general homesteading population, the male to female and single to family ratios were disproportionately weighted in favor of the former. Single women were not attracted to the isolation, hardships and lack of community that the river bottoms offered. Consequently, many of the men who settled on the river were middle-aged single men who never married after homesteading on the river.

Besides the effect on community, the special geographic setting compared to homestead experiences elsewhere on the Plains. Homesteaders along the Missouri River also developed and modified the landscapes of their claims to fit their unique environment. According to K. Ross Toole, the typical Montana homestead residence was "a wood shack covered with tar paper on the outside and newspaper on the inside" (Toole 1979: 231). For the most part however, settlers on the river used resources more readily available. Supplies for a frame house could be transported by barge on the river, or even hauled down the breaks from neighboring towns, but most Missouri River homesteaders opted to construct homes, barns, and other outbuildings with cottonwood and pine logs cut along the river and in the surrounding hills. Often when homesteaders first arrived on the river they did not have the resources or the time to construct a permanent residence. Breaking the land and planting crops was a higher priority. George Middleton's experience exemplifies the transitional living common for some of the homesteaders. He initially lived in a tent when he arrived in 1913. The bachelor then constructed a dugout where he lived until 1918. Many other homesteads along

the river had dugouts, cellars, or caves on their homesteads, many of which served as residences until cabins or houses could be built. In August of 1918, Middleton completed his log house and moved out of his dugout (Monahan 1997: 157). The dugout then served as a root cellar, as it did for many of the river settlers. Some of these dugouts were dug into the level ground, but the majority of them were located in the hillsides or the faces of coulees bisecting the homestead claims. Facades on dugouts and houses consisted of milled lumber, salvaged timbers from steamboat and barge wrecks, timber from the surrounding hills, and stone. The material used varied with the availability as well as the skills of the settlers.

The availability of water tended to be a deciding factor in the location of homesteads, and the order in which they were selected. Most homesteaders settled along springs, streams and rivers. Many others dug wells to supply their domestic needs. Missouri River homesteaders had plentiful water for their livestock and crops, but the muddy Missouri was not the most palatable water. The amount of capital required to purchase a pump might have been a factor in limiting the number of people who filed desert land claims along the river. Perhaps conditions were such that settlers did not feel the need to irrigate their crops; the early years were relatively lush years. Of all the claims patented along this portion of the Missouri River, only five were desert land claims. Most of the bottoms where homesteaders settled have coulees bisecting them, channeling seasonal alkali streams through their land. Others on the river either were forced to get drinking water from the river or catch it during snow and rain storms. Few springs have been identified along this stretch of the Missouri. Rain barrels were probably common sights along the river.

The isolation faced by Missouri River homesteaders rivaled any of those endured by homesteaders settling in other parts of eastern Montana. The monotony associated with settlers on the Great Plains, with nothing to block their view but miles of open prairie, compares with Missouri River life, with nothing to see but the Breaks and the river disappearing around the bend. Even with homesteaders claiming neighboring river bottoms and terraces, visual isolation still existed. In addition, the elements were as unrelenting on the river as on the Plains. Winters were harsh and cold, and summers were unbearably hot. Settlers all along the river lost homes, fences, and fields to the river. Erosion ate away the banks and channeled deep coulees through claims. The flood of 1908 destroyed houses up and down the river. Like elsewhere, some people persevered and rebuilt while others cashed in and moved away.

In the end, the Missouri River set these settlers apart from other Montana homesteaders. It defined them, they did not define it. Settlers were dependent upon the river for communication and supplies, and always for water. Little is left of homesteaders' efforts along the Missouri; a dilapidated cabin at one site, a collapsed dugout down the river. Homesteading history spans a brief period of Missouri River history often overlooked by river promoters and tour guides. Fortunately, physical evidence from the homesteading period still exists, allowing us a glimpse into a period less glamorous than explorers, steamboats and military exploits, yet equally as representative of settlement of the American West.

The Gus Nelson Homestead

There were two Gus Nelsons that lived in the Missouri River Breaks area – White Gus and Black Gus or Dirty Face Gus (Berry et. al. 2004; Bergum and Bergum 2004). Both moved into the country from "Kansas or someplace," and came in as government wolfers (Norskog and Norskog 2004). Both lived on the southside of the river near Winifred. Black Gus spent only a short period of time in the area but gained a reputation for walking everywhere he went (Norskog and Norskog 2004). The Gus Nelson associated with this homestead nomination was known as White Gus.

According to his birth certificate, Gus Nelson was born on March 7, 1870 in Krisianstad, Sweden. He moved to Montana and became a naturalized citizen in 1902 in Lewistown.

Gus entered Montana as a government "wolfer" (Arthur 2003). Being employed in such a position allowed Gus access to markets restrict from most people; as a result, Gus earned a good living hunting and trapping wolves, other furbearing animals and predators.

> To go out and shoot a deer wasn't easy to do. You worked at it. You might hunt for days to get a deer. I know he (Nelson) trapped beaver. He trapped beaver along the river, and he'd take them beaver pelts prepare em' for sale. I think some muskrat, he probably done some muskrat trappin'. Those old guys did that kind of thing, you know, that's what they lived off of (Arthur 2003:142, 143).

The local PN and Shonkin ranches paid a bounty of $25 for each wolf Gus dispatched; in addition, Gus could sell pelts to any customer he wished (Arthur 1988). This lucrative trade enabled Gus to quickly enter the cattle business (Arthur 2003:145, 146).

> …he went right into cattle. Even when he first settled there I'm sure he got right into cattle and was doing this wolfing and everything. He had an advantage over everybody else, because he knew how go about marketing wolves and how to get his bounty and all that type of stuff, that a lot of guys didn't have (Arthur 2003:145, 146).

To further augment his income, Gus drove stage between the PN Ranch and Big Sandy (Smith; Arthur 1988).

Around this time, Gus began erecting the buildings on his homestead. Gus built the main part of the cabin, though the south half was later added by Tom Kjorlein. Though Gus and Kjorlein were friends, no information exists indicating the construction date of the addition. By 1918, he had further developed the homestead with the addition of another log cabin, a log barn, storehouse, henhouse and cowshed. Between 1916 and 1919, Gus cultivated an average of about 12 acres of oats a year along with a few acres of rye and alfalfa that he cut for hay (Nelson 1919).

Just shy of his 50th birthday, on February 21, 1920, Gus received Patent #735815 for his 144.65 acre homestead located in T23N R22E Section 17. Five years later, Gus received a supplemental non-coal patent, Patent #963150, for 128.04 acres in T23N R22E sections 18 and 19. The year 1933 witnessed Gus

receiving Patent #1066753, a supplemental non-coal patent, for 105 acres in T23N R22E Section 17.

Some discrepancy exists from sources dating to the period of occupation. While official patents show occupation of the property by Gus Nelson, the General Land Office (GLO) map dating to 1917 indicates habitation by "Watson". This discrepancy is yet to be explained but could be the result of Nelson supplying a false name to surveyors, a mistake by the survey crew, or the occupation of the property by squatters prior to its habitation by Gus. The survey of the township began in June 1916 and was completed in October; it is possible Gus moved onto the property subsequent to the completion of the GLO survey.

Stories about Gus Nelson indicate he was not a man with which to be trifled. An ongoing problem confronted by many homesteaders along much of the Missouri River in the Breaks area in the early 1900s was river pirating. One story relates an encounter between Gus and river pirates:

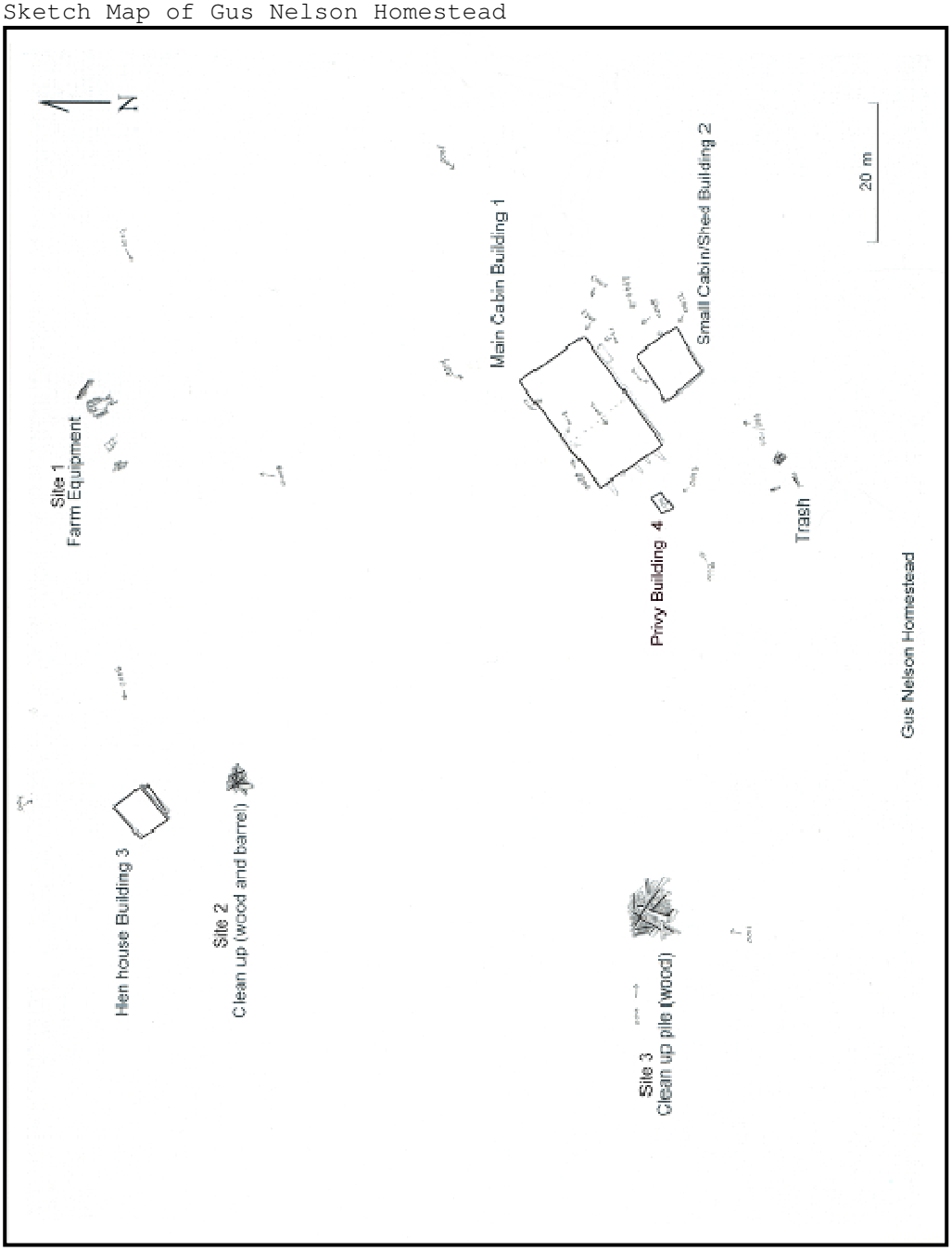
> He always told a story, I don't know if your interested in this, but I'll tell it to ya. He said they were having a – and this is probably 1900 1910 somewheres in that area – they were having a get together up at Woodhawk, 4th of July. And he said they'd been having trouble with people coming down river in boats and stopin' and raidin' their camps, stealin' anything they could get their hands on you know, and go on down river with it and they were in and out and gone. They weren't able to do much with em'. Gus said, "I had that feelin' that mornin'" and he says, "it might just be a good day to stay at home," and said, "and skip the celebration." So he knew what was going to happen. He knew there was somebody goin' to try and come along raid his place cause they figured he'd be gone. He said he took his 30-30 rifle, crawled up on the roof of the old barn. He said, "It was a dirt roof, the sun was shinin' down. It was a nice day. I was layin' there kind a relaxin', waiting to see if anything was guna happen." He said, "Pretty quick I could hear oars hittin' the water on this boat. Pretty quick they close enough to where I could hear their voices." He says, "Yah, evidently he's gone on his celebration for the day," he says, "lets go in there and see what we can come up with." He laid there. He said, "I waited there for em' to get up to the cabin" and he said they went in and fixed themselves up a couple of nice boxes. Fruit, canned fruit, and tomatoes and anything else they wanted. Then they went outside and they took the new harness he had just purchased off the wall where it was hangin' and he threw it down there in a pile and they had everything all gathered up and they were ready to head for the river. He says, "I just leveled my 30-30 down in front of em', and he says, "I just squeezed the trigger off and I blew wood chips in their face and everything." And then he said the fun begin. He said, "Oh – oh well we didn't – we wen't gonna steal anything." He says, "Well how come you packed it out of the cabin." And he says, "All the time they was slippin' around tryin' to get the position" where they could get the draw on him ya know. He says, "I seen what was happinin'. If you guys want to draw another breath of air, you'll head back to your boat and get outa here – now, immediately." The story doesn't end there. Only a few days later these two bodies, of these two individuals, show up floatin' down the river. Now whether

> Gus killed em' and threw em' in the river or whether someone else did, nobody really knows. Gus never told the hole story. He never said he did anyway. A lot of speculation was he took care of that problem then and there. He was a tough guy. They lived a tough life – they had to live that way. That's the way it was (Arthur 2003: 142, 143).

Gus Nelson spent his final years at a cow camp of Ervin Smith's (Arthur 1988). Gus became gravely ill and bedridden in 1951. Despite Ervin Smith's efforts to persuade Gus to go to the Lewistown hospital, Gus refused, preferring to die in the Breaks rather than a hospital bed (Smith 1986). One of Smith's ranch hands, Howard Skinner, was attending Gus the afternoon of March 21, 1951, when around 2:30 he heard a gunshot. The sound signaled the passing of one of the Missouri River Breaks colorful figures and a bachelor to his final day. Gus loved the Missouri River Breaks and stated his desire to be buried there (Smith 1986).

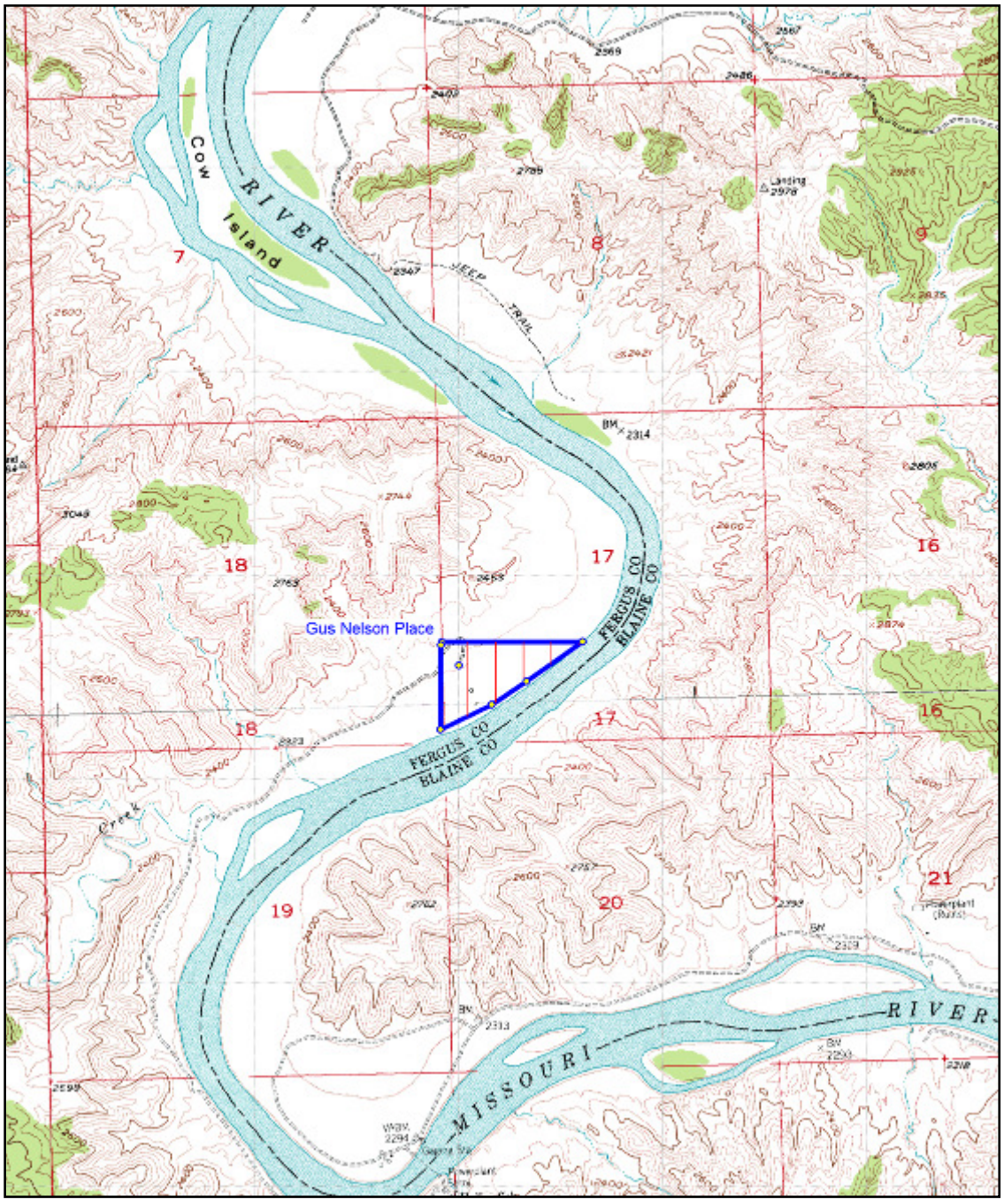
After Gus's death, occupation of the homestead never officially occurred again. Title passed to Frips Ekegren who lived on the north side of the river but used the Nelson Homestead to raise hay. Ekegren sold the property to Ervin Smith who subsequently sold it to Tom DeMars. The Bureau of Land Management acquired the property in 1982 (Fulbright 1998).

Sketch Map of Gus Nelson Homestead



1917 General Land Office Map of Gus Nelson Homestead, showes “Watson” at Gus Nelson Place.

Map of Gus Nelson Homestead on 7.5" USGS map Cow Island; MT 1954 and Baker Monument,1954



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Name of Property Gus Nelson Homestead

County and State Fergus County, MT

Name of multiple property listing (if applicable)

photographs Page 1

Photographer	Date Taken	Location of Originals	Subject	Direction	Photo #
Bud and Virginia Norskog	unknown	Lewistown BLM	Main Cabin Building 1	NE	1
Virginia O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Main Cabin Building 1	NE	2
Virginia O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Main Cabin Building 1	NW	3
Virginia O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Main Cabin Building 1	S	4
Virginia O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 1 & 2	SW	5
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 3	W	6
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 2	SW	7
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Site 1 Farm Equipment	NE	8
Virginia O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 1 & 3	SW	9
Virginia O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Site 3 Clean up Pile, Building 1 &2	E	10
Virginia O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Site 2 and 3 Clean up piles	NE	11
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Privy (Building 4) & Building 1	NE	12
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Privy (Building 4)	NW	13
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 1	SW	14
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 1	NW	15
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 1 (inside)	SW	16
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 1 (inside cellar)	N/A	17
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Paint box(inside building 1)	N/A	18
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Battery Core (inside between building 1&2)	N/A	19
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	roof building 1	NE	20
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Foundation and Chinking Building 1	N	21
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 2	NW	22
Robert C. O'Boyle	2009	Lewistown BLM	Building 1	NW	23
courtesy of J. and L. Bergam	unknown		August “Gus” Nelson holding bobcatin front of wagon load of pelts	N/A	24

Photo # 0001

Photo # 0002

Photo # 0003

Photo # 0004

Photo # 0005

Photo # 0006

Photo # 0007

Photo #0008

Photo #0009

Photo # 0010

Photo #0011

Photo # 0012

Photo # 0013

Photo # 0014

Photo #0015

Photo # 0016

Photo # 0017

Photo # 0018

Photo # 0019

Photo # 0020

Photo # 0021

Photo # 0022

Photo # 0023

Photo # 0024